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ABSTRACT

Concern among Mississippi educators about the definition, scope, and future role of high school social studies led to a statewide survey of high school principals' and social studies teachers' opinions and recommendations. A total of 150 principals and 300 teachers, chosen randomly, answered a 55-item High School Social Studies Curriculum Opinionnaire adapted from National Council for the Social Studies Guidelines to determine perceptions of existing and desirable high school social studies curricula. Mean scores were computed for each item and existing and desirable curricula compared. An analysis of the data indicated the need to improve existing curricula. While no significant difference was recorded in mean perceptions of principals and teachers of the existing curriculum, there were significant differences in teachers' and principals' perceptions of desired curricula. Principals felt that the desired curriculum should emphasize greater cross-cultural contact, greater participation in the real world, utilization of community resources, more specific objectives, and more concept-based study. Teachers' desired changes focused on obtaining more appropriate instructional materials and facilities, greater academic freedom, and increased teacher participation in professional activities. A similar study analyzing students' and administrators' perceptions was recommended. (LP)

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PRINCIPALS' AND SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM IN MISSISSIPPI

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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of high school principals and teachers of the existing and desirable high school social studies curriculum in Mississippi.

Among the important powers of local boards of education is the establishment of policies relating to planning, development, improvement, and accountability of the school and appraisal of its work. The extent to which needed improvements can be made within the school system is largely determined by the kind and quality of leadership within that school system.[1]

Curricular policy at the local level is the shared responsibility of local boards of education or their representatives, the school's professional staff, and the community. The process of curriculum planning among these groups varies widely.[2]

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[1]Edgar L. Morphet, Roe L. Johns, and Theodore L. Reller, Educational Organization and Administration, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), pp. 311-312, 402.

[2]J. Galen Saylor and William M. Alexander, Planning Curriculum for Schools (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974), pp. 57-58.

At many state conferences and workshops, Mississippi teachers have voiced concern about the high school social studies curricula.[3] No systematic effort has been made to determine teachers' and principals' perceptions of the high school social studies curricula in the State of Mississippi or to determine if there is a need for revision of it. Brown asserted that a study of the social studies curriculum should give teachers and principals an opportunity to express their views of the nature of the existing social studies curricula in the public schools of Mississippi as well as their perceptions of what it should be.[4]

High school social studies curricula have been plagued throughout the twentieth century by vague definitions of scope, sequence, rationale, and objectives.[5] There is a lack of agreement among teachers, principals, and experts about what the high school social studies curriculum is and about what it should be. Because of this lack of agreement about scope and sequence, anything and everything has been included in the social studies curriculum.[6]

Mississippi, like other states, is hampered by vague definitions of the high school social studies curriculum. In order to improve this

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[3]Series of Interviews with Lucien Ellington, President, Mississippi Council for Social Studies, Delta State University, 1982.

[4]Interview with Nancy Brown, Consultant on Social Studies to the State Department of Education, Jackson, Mississippi, October 1982.

[5]John D. Haas, The Current State of Social Studies: Rationales, Goals, and Objectives (Washington, D.C.: National Science Foundation, 1981), p. 24.

[6]Karen B. Wiley, "The Status of Pre-College Science, Mathematics, and Social Science Education, 1955-1975," Social Science Education 3 (1977):17.

situation, there is a need to assess principals' and teachers' perceptions of existing and desirable social studies curricula.

Need for the Study

Successful social studies curricular revision requires involvement of teachers, supervisors and principals. However, their involvement may be of a different nature. The principal is responsible for bringing about change and innovation in response to the changing needs of society.[7] Principals who wish to insure maximum effectiveness of the social studies curricula must be educational leaders who use every opportunity to become familiar with successful social studies curriculum and who encourage teachers to develop more successful curricular strategies. When a school implements a new program or changes an existing one, the principal is the key to the success or failure of that effort. As an instructional leader, the principal is responsible for assisting the faculty in its efforts to develop educational programs that work.[8] Principals may be active in the planning process or they may serve only as advisors. They must be involved, however, since their approval and support of any change is vital to the acceptance of new curricula.[9]

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[7]Morphet et al., Educational Organization and Administration, p. 159.

[8]Asa G. Hillard, "Leadership for Effective School Procedures," Developing Basic Skills Programs in Secondary Schools (Alexandria. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1982), pp. 123-124.

[9]Gerald Ponder, "Getting Real: Suggestions for Revising the Social Studies Curriculum," Educational Leadership 40 (January 1983): 57.

Most social studies programs emphasize the acquisition of knowledge, while social studies teachers are confronted with a knowledge explosion. Thus every year, the social studies teachers are faced with the problem of choosing the knowledge believed most important. This problem is made more difficult because some knowledge becomes obsolete each year.[10] It is important for social studies teachers and high school principals to assess the social studies curriculum and determine if it is meeting the needs of students and preparing them to function as productive citizens in society.

Most states have adopted standard scope and sequence frameworks. This encourages continuity and comprehensiveness in the social studies curriculum. Mississippi does not have a standardized scope and sequence in the social studies curriculum.[11] Students moving from one district to another within the state often find varying social studies curricula, thus requiring a period of readjustment. Accountability and higher college entrance requirements are causing Mississippi educators to reconsider the social studies curriculum.

Nancy Brown, the State Department of Education Social Studies Consultant, made a strong case for a study such as this one. At the 1982 Mississippi Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference Brown asserted that:

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[10]"Social Studies Skills," Arkansas Department of Education, Little Rock, Arkansas, (1977):10.

[11]Nancy Brown, "Presentation on the Nature of Social Studies in Mississippi," Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference, Fall 1982.

1. There is uncertainty about the current state of the high school social studies curriculum and about what it should be.

2. There is concern about the social studies materials being used.

3. There are no standardized scope and sequence for social studies in Mississippi.

4. There is little uniformity in the state social studies curriculum.

5. There is a national movement toward the requirement of state history in the seventh instead of ninth grade.

6. In some districts, United States history in the eighth and eleventh grades goes just past the Civil War. Therefore, many students finish high school without having learned any recent United States history. United States history should have scope and sequence which prevent this from happening.

7. The process of developing curricular plans gives principals and teachers concerns; thus, they are asking questions about what should be taught at each level.

8. Accountability and Instructional Management (AIM) has generated concern about what is being taught in high school social studies and how it is being taught.

9. Social studies American College Test (ACT) scores are generally lower than ACT scores in math, science, or English.[12]

The high school social studies curriculum is often the first to feel the pressure of mandates to solve social problems and among the first to feel the reduction in funds and time allocated when priorities are reexamined.

The National Science Foundation (NSF) Directorate commissioned three studies on the status of science, mathematics, and social studies

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[12]Nancy Brown, "Presentation on the Nature of Social Studies in Mississippi."

education in order to gain better information for program and policy decisions about NSF's role in education.[13] A nationwide survey was conducted to obtain information from administrators and teachers about the courses offered, the texts and other materials used, the time spent in teaching each subject, and the use of materials from federally-sponsored curriculum projects.[14]

These studies generated the organization of a national research project referred to as SPAN, which was funded by the National Science Foundation in 1978, for a period of two years. Project SPAN reported that there is national concern about the lack of interest in social studies by students, lack of flexibility in teaching methods, and the availability and usage of administrative instructional management.[15] Teachers and principals need to participate in curricular study and development if such problems are to be addressed and solved. The SPAN report will be explained in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The Accountability and Instructional Management movement in Mississippi requires a serious evaluation of the curriculum if the needs of students in an ever-changing society are to be met. A better-planned curriculum is needed in high school social studies in order to meet the needs of students in an increasingly complex society.

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[13]Irving Morrissett, "Project SPAN: Analysis and Proposals for the 1980s," Social Education 44 (December 1980):558.

[14]Iris R. Weiss, "Report of the 1977 National Survey of Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies Education," Report to the National Science Foundation (Triangle Park, North Carolina: Center for Educational Research and Evaluation, [1979]), p. 14.

[15]Irving Morrissett, ed., Social Studies in the 1980s: A Report of Project SPAN (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1980), p. viii.

This is the first known study of this nature in Mississippi. Therefore, the data provided from it should be useful in efforts to improve the high school social studies programs in Mississippi public schools.

The Problem

The problem was to determine and compare the perceptions of selected high school principals and social studies teachers of the existing and the desirable high school social studies curriculum in Mississippi.

As a means of structuring the problem, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Will there be significant differences in the perceptions of high school principals and social studies teachers of the existing high school social studies curriculum in Mississippi?

2. Will there be significant differences in the perceptions of high school principals and social studies teachers of the desirable high school social studies curriculum in Mississippi?

3. Will there be significant differences in the perceptions of high school principals of the existing and desirable high school social studies curriculum?

4. Will there be significant differences in the perceptions of high school social studies teachers of the existing and desirable high school social studies curriculum?

Procedures

The subjects studied were 150 high school principals and 300 high school social studies teachers randomly selected from the school districts in Mississippi. There were 107 usable responses returned by high school teachers.

The instrument used to collect the data was the High School Social Studies Curriculum Opinionaire adapted from the National Council of Social Studies Guidelines. The High School Social Studies Opinionaire was structured to obtain the perceptions of high school principals and secondary social studies teachers of the existing and desirable high school social studies curriculum. The instrument consisted of 55 items designed to determine respondents' perceptions of the existing and desirable high school curriculum. Mean scores were computed for each of the items and the existing and desirable curriculum were compared.

One-way analysis of variance was used in the statistical analyses of the data collected to answer questions one and two. Correlated "t" tests were used to analyze the data in questions three and four. The .05 level of confidence was used for determining statistical significance.

Findings

Analysis of the data collected appeared to justify the following conclusions:

1. No significant difference in the mean perceptions of high school principals and social studies teachers of the existing high school social studies curriculum was found. However, principals rated 25 items higher than teachers and teachers rated 29 items higher than principals. Both groups gave one item the same rating.

2. Significant differences in the perceptions of high school principals and social studies teachers of the desirable social studies curriculum were found on 13 of the 55 items. Teachers perceived these items as more important than the principals did. Four of the items dealt with evaluation of student progress: teachers favored a variety of forms of continuous, comprehensive evaluation, and the use of the resulting data in curricular planning and revision. Three of the items dealt with specific courses: teachers felt that ethnic studies should be included in the curriculum as an elective, law related education should be required, and American government should be extended to a full year course. Teachers felt that the curriculum should take into account the aptitudes and needs of students, the social world as it is, and proficiency in methods of inquiry. Teachers indicated a stronger desire for innovation in the classroom and the availability of consultants than did principals. They also indicated a stronger desire than the principals to relate the curriculum to the needs of the community.

3. Significant differences in the perceptions of high school principals of the existing and desirable high school social studies curriculum were found on 18 items. Principals rated the desirable curriculum of greater importance than the existing curriculum on each of these 18 items.

Principals felt that the desirable social studies curriculum should allow students to meet with students different from themselves and to participate in the real world. They also indicated a strong desire for the curriculum to be based on valid concepts, principles and theories from the social sciences and to draw on concepts from all the social sciences. Principals felt that the study of human achievement and failure should be included in the social studies curriculum.

Principals indicated a preference for more careful and more specific objectives. They felt objectives should be selected on the basis of knowledge of the students, community, and social reality. They felt that knowledge, comprehension, valuing and social participation should be included as objectives and that general statements should be translated into specific objectives which identify clearly what students are to learn. They felt students should be clear about what they are to learn and that instructional objectives should include all levels of the affective and cognitive domains. They also indicated a belief that teachers should participate in high school social studies curriculum revision as decision makers as well as advisors.

Principals felt that the social studies program should draw upon the potential co tributions of many kinds of resource persons and use the school and community as learning aids. They felt that evaluation should include assessment of knowledge, skills, thinking, valuing, and participation.

4. Significant differences in the perceptions of high school social studies teachers of the existing and desirable high school curriculum were found on 51 of the items. Only four items showed no significant difference. These were: providing intensive and recurring cross-cultural study of diverse groups, objectives containing statements which identify clearly what students are to learn, the learning activities to be used, and the instructional materials to be used for achieving the stated objectives; they felt that Mississippi history and civics should be a requirement in the secondary social studies curriculum on the ninth grade level instead of Mississippi history and state government.

Teachers felt that the desirable social studies curriculum would require appropriate instructional materials and facilities. They also indicated a desire for participation in activities that develop professional competence. They believed that there should be a district wide policy statement on academic freedom and professional responsibility.

5. The findings of the study imply that high school principals' and teachers' perceptions of the existing social studies curriculum are similar. Teachers viewed curricular adjustments as more important than high school principals. High school principals

perceived a need for improvement; but to a lesser extent than teachers. Principals seemed more satisfied with what existed than high school social studies teachers. High school social studies teachers perceived a need for modifications of the existing high school social studies curriculum in Mississippi.

6. The review of the literature indicates that there is a need to improve the high school social studies curriculum and that need is supported by the findings of this study. There is a perceived need to modify the high school social studies curriculum in other states. Thus, the perceptions of Mississippi high school principals and social studies teachers are generally congruent with those of educators in other states.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are offered for future research as a result of this investigation:

1. A similar study should be conducted comparing the perceptions of high school students on the existing and desirable high school social studies curriculum.

2. A similar study should be conducted comparing the perceptions of superintendents and school board members of the existing and desirable high school social studies curriculum.

3. A study should be conducted comparing the perceptions of various subgroups on the existing and desirable social studies materials available for classroom use.

4. Similar studies should be conducted in local districts to provide a data base for high school social studies curriculum improvements.